

THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN
SERVICES
ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

AND

THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION

NORTHWEST REGIONAL YOUTH FORUM PROCEEDINGS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF PARTNERSHIPS
PROMOTING POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR
YOUTH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GOALS AND PROCESS

The NW Youth Forum was held on June 27th 2002, in Bellevue, Washington. Participants represented a broad cross section of youth, community partnerships and federal regional agencies.

In the months leading up to the forum, many of those who participated were interviewed to obtain their input on the structure of the forum and their interest in implementing forum recommendations.

These meetings together with the goals developed for the National Youth Summit coinciding with this forum in Washington D.C., helped focus the forum on the role that federal agencies could play in developing positive youth development partnerships with community programs. It was hoped that recommendations could be developed which would help agencies provide enriching experience to all youth especially those with specific challenges.

Forum participants framed the day's issues by exploring four areas: capacity building, youth empowerment, youth involvement and community service opportunities. Attendees heard from regional and, via satellite, national leaders. Most importantly, those at the forum had an opportunity to participate in multiple discussion groups, producing the recommendations appearing in this document. Those involved in the discussion groups gave the forum high marks for the opportunity to provide this input and expressed the hope that federal agencies would consult these recommendations as a next step.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL LEADERS

Participants were unanimous in the belief that it was time for a more coordinated National youth policy agenda. There were many recommendations on how this can be done. These recommendations are addressed to leaders able to shape National policy. Forum attendees recommend that such leaders:

- Pursue a series of high-level youth initiatives
- Design youth initiatives from a strength-based perspective, focused on building assets that are important to positive youth development
- Focus appropriations on providing enriching experiences for youth such as skill building, civic involvement and service learning
- Strengthen community level youth serving partnerships and larger coalitions of youth serving organizations

- Include youth from all cultural, socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds
- Support the community integration of youth with disabilities or special health care needs.
- Recognize the cooperative relation between community youth serving organizations and faith based communities
- Construct a consensus with respect to measuring and evaluating positive youth outcomes

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MEDIA AND THOSE WHO CAN INFLUENCE OTHERS

Discussion groups emphasized the need to base youth policy on specific principles of youth empowerment. Recommendations in this section of the report are addressed to all those who care about changing societies perception of and attitudes toward youth. Forum participants strongly suggested that those in the media and in all positions of influence:

- Identify venues to change attitudes with regard to the value of youth
- Promote ways of working that give youth an equal voice
- Involve youth as leaders and decision-makers
- Accept youth as positive newsmakers

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FEDERAL AGENCIES AND REGIONAL OFFICE PROGRAMS

Recommendations from discussion groups provided direct guidance on involving youth in federal programs; a step which was felt to be central to any federal youth initiatives. These recommendations are addressed to federal agencies and regional offices. Here are some examples of actions these agencies and their staff could take:

- Involve youth across all federal programs not just those agencies serving youth
- Identify and make visible any and all mentoring and service learning opportunities
- Augment the number of youth internships
- Arrange for staff training on youth empowerment and involvement
- Involve young people in the grant making, regulatory, service delivery and policy making process
- Encourage the professionalization of youth involvement and youth work

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THOSE WHO DESIGN FEDERAL REGULATIONS

These proceedings also contain recommendations regarding federal program design. Forum participants recommended that federal program design:

- Integrate and coordinate federal policy, encouraging exchange of information between federal agencies and with community organizations
- Provide long term sustained support and community program flexibility
- Encourage federal reporting on the development of individual youth assets while de-emphasizing measurement of process or final disposition
- Improve training with regard to the federal grant making process

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM MANAGERS COMMITTED TO INVOLVING YOUTH

These recommendations are addressed to those charged with increasing the involvement of youth in program development and operation at all levels of community, regional and national. Successful strategies would:

- Create a clear understanding of the value of youth input
- Define results expected of youth and identify how youth input will be sought
- Train those involved in supporting youth and creating mentoring opportunities
- Provide fair compensation for involved youth
- Pursue flexible human resource policies
- Create a youth friendly environment
- Support environments where setbacks are viewed as opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THOSE INVOLVING YOUTH IN SPECIFIC PROGRAMS

Involvement of youth will only be successful if outreach to youth is adequate. Forum participants also provided recommendations addressed to those interested in improving their ability to reach out to youth. Forum participants saw the need to:

- Improve methods of contacting youth, whether in school or on the streets
- Use technology to reach technologically knowledgeable young people
- Emphasize artistic and cultural venues for reaching youth

- Assure cultural competency in all outreach
- Plan to make youth programs accessible
- Reinvent the grant making process, using it as a venue for outreach to youth

We believe that these proceedings will help frame discussion and future action. During the coming year we will hold follow up meetings to pursue recommendations addressed to regional federal agencies. We will also give this report the broadest circulation among those in a position to influence attitudes toward youth and those seeking increased youth involvement. This report will also be considered as part of a long-term commitment on the part of federal agencies interested in supporting a national youth policy agenda.

THE NW YOUTH FORUM: HOW THESE RECOMMENDATIONS CAME ABOUT

The participants gathered for this event were among the most knowledgeable and dedicated youth workers in the Northwest. The event was co-sponsored by two federal agencies and attended by seven additional federal agencies.

FORUM GOALS

Forum participants were given several goals to help focus the day's recommendations. These goals were:

- To encourage innovative youth and community partnerships that will enrich the lives of young people and improve positive outcomes for youth
- To identify and share successful strategies as well as challenges that are faced in building strong community – youth partnerships
- To promote methods that assure these partnerships reach out to include young people with few community connections or special challenges
- To provide an open forum in which to discuss some of the ways that federal agencies can work with communities to promote the success of youth - community partnerships and reduce barriers to their success
- To encourage new approaches for federal agencies and communities to assure that innovative partnerships reach all youth throughout the Northwest
- To develop recommendations for federal agencies hoping to implement new youth development partnerships – involving youth and community youth leaders in the design and delivery of federally funded programs

FORUM PROCESS

PLENARY SPEAKERS

Carolyn Oakley, the Secretary's Regional Representative to HHS, welcomed conferees and introduced Walter Liang, the Secretary's Regional Representative to DOL. Tanene Allison, Media and Public Affairs Officer for the San Francisco Youth Commission, gave the keynote address.

A plenary panel at the conference helped participants focus on key aspects of positive youth development. With respect to this segment of the conference we would like to acknowledge the following presenters: "*Capacity Building*", Kris Latimer, The Oregon Consortium and Oregon Alliance; "*Community Service*", Marcie Sample, Community Youth Services; "*Youth Leadership*", Liz Vivian, Seattle Youth Involvement Network and "*Youth Empowerment*", Jerry Fest, JT Fest Consulting.

Another feature of the conference was the live broadcast via satellite of a plenary session of the National Youth Conference in Washington DC, part of the Administration for Children and Families continuing effort to develop a more coordinated response to the needs of youth. Speakers at the plenary included HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson, Attorney General John Ashcroft, USDA Secretary Ann Veneman, Congressman Richard Burr (R - NC) and Family and Youth Service Bureau Associate Commissioner Harry Wilson.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Forum participants were asked to participate in two discussion groups to help interpret this call for greater responsiveness and to identify what could be done to support youth and strengthen communities in the Pacific Northwest.

The conference emphasized that it is adults and mentors in communities, not large social service systems alone, that can give young people an awareness of trust, a feeling of competence and a sense of belonging. Therefore, the first round of discussion groups was hosted by one of six community agencies. Participants were asked to identify the opportunities and barriers to supporting positive youth development and community - youth partnerships, especially with respect to youth who are less connected or who have special needs.

With regard to this round of discussions we would like to extend appreciation to our discussion hosts: Vaughneta Barton, Big Brothers Big Sisters of King & Pierce County; Howard Finck, Friends of Youth; Jim Theofolis, The Mockingbird Society; Todd Couture, National Youth Leadership Network; Connie Carley, Oregon Commission on Children and Families; Kris Latimer, The Oregon Consortium and Oregon Alliance and Allison Turner, OHSU Center on Self-determination.

The conference also emphasized that federal agencies are a significant source of support for community youth partnerships. Conferees were asked to suggest ways to advance beyond a legacy of narrow, problem-focused legislation. Therefore, the second round of discussion groups were hosted by one of nine federal agencies in attendance. Participants were asked to identify innovative partnerships between federal agencies and community youth organizations and to discuss ways in which we can assure that every youth in the region has access to these partnerships. Participants were also asked to identify new ways to involve youth in the design and delivery of federal programs.

Our thanks to the federal staff who hosted one of these discussion session: Lisa Eschenbach, National Park Service; Barbara Wong, Social Security Administration; Diana Koreski, US Department of Education; Vince Herberholt and Susan Sanders, US Department of Health and Human Services; Thomas Kenny, US Department of Housing and Urban Development; Eric Steiner, US Department of Labor; John Miller, WA Corporation for National and Community Service; Sharon Ferrell, WA Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee(DOJ/OJJDP); and Kevin Wright, WSU 4-H Youth Development (USDA).

PROCEEDINGS

The Youth Forum included a reporting session that has resulted in the recommendations in this report. They are meant to be a starting point for further coordinated activity among federal agencies and between federal agencies and community organizations to support a culture that is "with youth, for youth and by youth."

These proceedings were compiled and edited by Steve Ice and the ACF special populations team (206) 615-2210. For additional copies contact the NW Network for Youth (206) 628-3760.

We would like to thank those youth and adults from the following programs who consulted with us prior to the forum or who through their attendance and participation helped to formulate these recommendations. Their input was vital in defining youth-community partnerships that exemplify positive youth development:

| | |
|---|---|
| Asian Counseling and Referral Service | Big Brothers Big Sisters |
| Boys and Girls Clubs of King County | Campfire USA |
| Cascades Job Corp | Casey Family Programs |
| City of Seattle Dept. of Human Services | City of Seattle Dept of Parks & Recreation |
| Community Youth Services | Friends of Youth |
| J.T. Fest Consulting | King County Work Training |
| Looking Glass | Mockingbird Society |
| National Council for Youth Policy | National Youth Leadership Network |
| NW Network for Youth | OHSU Center on Self Determination |
| Oregon Commission on Children & Families | Oregon Workforce Alliance |
| Peace for the Streets | Points of Light Foundation |
| San Francisco Youth Commission | Seattle Youth Opportunity |
| Student Conservation Association NW | United Way of King County |
| University District Partnership for Youth | WA DSHS Children's Administration |
| WA DSHS Alcohol and Drug Abuse | WA Governor's Committee on Disability |
| WA Governor's Juvenile Justice Commission | WA Office of Superintendent of Public Inst. |
| WA State Institute for Pubic Policy | Worksystems Incorporated |
| Workforce Development Council of Seattle | YMCA of Greater Seattle |
| Youthcare | Youth Involvement Network |

These proceedings and recommendations would not have been possible without the special contributions of the following individuals: Steve Henigson, Regional Administrator ACF (Administration for Children and Families; Steve Ice, ACF Special Populations Team lead; Marilyn Devaney, Caron Dwyer, Gale Merfalen and Judith Wood of the ACF Special Populations Team; Mike Brauser, Regional Administrator DOL/ETA (Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration); Denise Fogleman and Eric Steiner, DOL/ETA; and Gary Hammons and Cassie Koehn, Northwest Network for Youth.

FORUM EVALUATION

One quarter rated the forum as "excellent", half rated the forum as "very good", twenty percent as "good" and five percent as "satisfactory". Nearly all rated the keynote speaker and panelists as very dynamic. The need for greater ethnic representation was also expressed. The satellite presentation was rated as being of only marginal benefit with a preference for more youth and non-governmental speakers. Breakout sessions were rated as "very

beneficial", especially with respect to discussion focus, networking time and youth involvement. There was broad consensus that there are far too few opportunities for networking involving a broad coalition of youth and youth workers and that youth involvement was key to making this a successful forum. Many also expressed the hope that this forum would lead to further opportunities for training, resource mapping, sharing of success stories, greater collaboration with schools and business, hands on youth activism and federal youth initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A NATIONAL YOUTH AGENDA

RECOGNIZE THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY AGENDA

Many participants felt that the Nation needs a more focused youth development policy agenda. While there are many effective programs that support positive youth development, there is a lack of coordination between the programs and too many youth are being left behind. Moreover, such a policy should not focus simply on safety, literacy or employment alone, but rather it should be centered on helping every young person gain the assets needed to become a functional individual able to make a positive contribution to their community. Many expressed the view that it is no longer acceptable to leave capacity building, youth involvement, the opportunity to serve one's community and skills in choice-making to a haphazard mix of categorical programs that are failing to reach some of the youth that would most benefit. While the Nation has generally accepted that there are unique needs during such transitions in life as early childhood and retirement, the transition years of adolescence have received far less attention. Passionate leadership, openness and realism were thought to characterize strong positive youth development policy and powerful community - youth partnerships. It was expressed that youth policy could move communities beyond stereotypes and divisiveness by building a consensus around the opportunities that youth involvement presents and our collective duty to respond.

"Adolescents need our ongoing support just as much as young children."

- Carolyn Oakley, Secretary's Regional Representative, HHS Region X

ENCOURAGE HIGH LEVEL NATIONAL YOUTH INITIATIVES

Discussion groups emphasized that a National youth policy agenda must be promoted from the highest level and in a sustained manner over the long term. The benefits of a long-term policy emphasis have been shown at the state level by such programs as the ACF Family Youth Service Bureau's Collaborative Demonstration Projects. Certain standards such as youth safety should be met in every jurisdiction in the country without exception. There are too many good programs that start in one community or another only to fizzle after a few years due to a lack of resources and rapidly changing political attention. This leaves little long-term material support for community youth programs. State social service agencies often overburdened with young children gradually come to view all youth as low risk. More continuity is needed and a longer-term commitment between federal, state and community organizations. Now is the time to build the broad coalition necessary to making positive youth development a reality in every county in the country.

FOCUS POLICY ON POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Many wished to emphasize that youth policy is not just about avoiding cigarettes, drinking, gang involvement or early sexual activity. Rather, the focus must be on positive activities of interest to youth and on helping youth build strong relationships with others. It

was noted by some that these relationships provide hope and will give young people a natural incentive to make wise choices for themselves. We should focus at least as much attention on prevention as we do on emergency intervention.

“The success of our younger generations will depend in large part upon the commitment and the attitude of both older and younger generations in developing relationships.”

- John Ashcroft, Attorney General

FOCUS APPROPRIATIONS ON INCREASING YOUTH OPPORTUNITY

Some participants mentioned the Younger American's Act as one example of how to embody a National youth development policy. Others stressed the need for passionate National and community leadership. There was wide agreement on the need to find ways to involve youth that go beyond make-work and tokenism, providing young people with service-learning and community involvement opportunities that mesh with their interests

STRENGTHEN LOCAL YOUTH NETWORKS AND COALITIONS

Participants were uniformly excited about the networking opportunity that the forum provided, noting that while there are many youth groups, there are few large-scale coalitions between youth groups truly representative of diverse youth voices. It was felt that building these broad youth coalitions should be a principle goal of National youth policy. While agencies may compete for funding, they often share an interest in cooperatively advocating for broad youth issues. In general, opportunities to network should be fostered because they promote sharing of success stories and innovative use of resources. Sometimes communication of innovative ideas requires nothing more than a youth who is able to do peer-to-peer interviews with other youth in similar programs in the region.

SUPPORT POLICY THAT ADDRESSES ALL YOUTH

Attendees stressed that National youth policy should acknowledge the seventy five percent of youth who are doing ok while also focusing on the twenty five percent of youth who have not had an opportunity to develop all the assets needed for a positive future. This concern was further elaborated in discussions: National policy should avoid dividing youth into 'our kids' - kids doing ok and 'their kids' - kids having problems such as drug involvement, homelessness, or juvenile offenses. Youth policy should include ways to involve adults as well as youth from all cultural backgrounds. Policy should address the needs and very different resources of urban, suburban and rural communities. Special efforts should be made to address the unique needs and cultural resources of Native American youth. Participants underscored that Tribal youth often receive little support from surrounding communities. It was also believed that federal programs allow tribes few funding resources to support youth programs.

"The report "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance" shows that three quarters of American youth are making safe sensible choices for their lives and the remaining quarter may be at risk, but they certainly are not lost. We are going to do everything we can to reach that group of youth through a positive youth development approach."

- Tommy Thompson, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services

ASSURE THAT POLICY MEETS THE NEEDS OF YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

Some participants expressed concern that young people with disabilities are often excluded thereby reducing their connection to the community. The social construction of youth with chronic health conditions often leads to a feeling of passivity and lack of empowerment. Therefore, it is especially important to build statewide organizations and forums able to teach such youth the skills of self-advocacy and leadership. It was recommended that additional focus be given to supporting youth with disabilities who wish to take charge of their own problem solving, creating an environment of self reliance as they determine and act on their own choices. Internships and peer mentoring were felt to be particularly important for these youth during the period of transition from school to work.

SUPPORT COOPERATION BETWEEN COMMUNITY AND FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Participants concurred that there is a strong need to support and make visible the complementary relationship existing between youth serving faith-based organizations and community based nonprofits. Faith based organizations often rely on the administrative and programmatic capability found in nonprofit corporation designed to provide comprehensive social work services to youth in need. At the same time, many of these youth serving nonprofits depend on the talent and material support of faith based organizations. Therefore, some forum participant's felt that youth focused faith-based outreach should extend beyond simply encouraging faith based organizations to bid for federal resources.

ENCOURAGE GREATER YOUTH AND COMMUNITY PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY

The call for a National youth policy agenda was not simply a request for greater appropriations. It was also recognized that there is a need for greater accountability. Attendees believed that youth service objectives in non-profit, state and federal programs would be greatly facilitated through the development of a more uniform agreement on the outcomes desired and ways to measure and report National progress. A second benefit might be a reduction of any duplication in service so that more programs might be funded to reach youth with special challenges. At minimum, youth program information systems should be reviewed for greater compatibility. A National youth policy would begin with common agreements on how to evaluate quality outcomes in youth programs such as increasing positive youth development assets. It was also felt that more progress could be made in reliably measuring how many youth receive service and in reducing underutilized, duplicative or inefficient services.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN AGENDA THAT EMPOWERS YOUTH

CHANGE ATTITUDES REGARDING THE VALUE OF YOUTH

If positive youth development is the cornerstone for an effective National youth policy, youth empowerment is the ground on which this cornerstone rests. Participants expressed the consensus that youth-adult partnerships work well only when it is admitted that young people are capable of identifying complex issues and providing valuable insight into real solutions. Attendees stressed that National youth initiatives must be built on the understanding that young people have more interest, greater knowledge and better first hand experience than many adults are willing to recognize. Too often adults approach youth involvement with a patronizing attitude rather than offering youth an opportunity to be of service to their community. There is a need to change the adult perception that youth can't teach and mentor adults. Adults need to recognize that they can learn from the experience of youth and that youth - adult interaction involves learning for both partners. Just listening to a young person is a very powerful and empowering act toward that end. The biggest factor in developing a positive identity for youth is an adult who is mindful of what a young person is saying and willing to make a caring response. Letting a young person tell their story is a powerful way to learn about the elements needed for a stronger community. Youth can also mentor adults and adults who interact with youth need to believe this. Youth can easily sense insincerity, tokenism, lack of empowerment and processes designed to put them into a passive role. Work services are a particular issue because youth can quickly sense whether what they are doing is simply 'make work' and whether doing a good job counts. Once the youth adult partnership becomes insincere the resultant gap in trust is difficult to bridge.

It was noted that youth must also sometimes change their attitudes. Some youth become accustomed to a passive role - a role limited to being a consumer. It is difficult to create change once youth have come to believe that they will not be heard or that they will not be given credibility. While being supportive, it is important that programs not do so much handholding with youth that they do not leave youth an opportunity to be accountable. With the proper support, young people themselves are best able to determine a path to their future. Engaging this power means helping youth understand and accept responsibility for choices and risks they make. Adults can bring about the conditions which make this possible by trusting youth to act, within established goals and roles, on their own.

"Some young people and the age at which they achieved greatness:

Marco Polo: Asian expedition, age 17; Sacagawea: Lewis and Clark expedition age 14; Johnny "Appleseed" America's nursery man, age 16; "Calamity" Jane, scout for General Custer, age 18; Anne Frank wrote her diary, age 14; The Dalai Lama, negotiated with China, age 16; Major General Lafayette, Continental Army, age 19; Saint Joan of Arc, French victory, age 17; Alexander the Great, regent of Macedon, age 16; Sitting Bull, united Lakota tribes, age 14; Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt at age 17."

- Jerry Fest, J.T.Fest Consulting

I lived in an everyday town

In an apathetic town

In an all-too-common town where

Silence – was spoken

– From “Just A Child” Tanene Allison, San Francisco Youth Commission

PROMOTE POLICIES THAT GIVE YOUTH A VOICE

Participants reported that successful initiatives involving youth are dependent on a high degree of parity between the youth and adults involved. Youth who are empowered have ownership, want to participate and will live up to the expectations set but first they must be empowered partners. Empowerment of youth does not just mean providing more training to youth, it also means removing barriers to youth involvement. Getting adults to step out of the way and turn over a certain amount of decision making power so that youth can act as leaders and agents of change is often the biggest barrier to empowerment. Several attendees noted that our youth policy agenda must evolve beyond the statement that "youth are our future." Youth are also our present and their voice needs to be heard now, not just considered a receptacle waiting for some future in which to be heard. Discussion groups discovered that innovative community partnerships, which are successful in involving youth, are invariably characterized as places where young people feel empowered. This means they feel they are a part of a team, sharing equally in challenge and success. More than one group added this caveat: Empowering environments don't happen without some conscious consideration. Youth adult partnerships require preparation to overcome differences of perception while building trust. Like all relationships, it is important to establish mutual goals and put effort into maintaining equilibrium in the face of challenges.

We've got to find each other

We've got to listen

Because there, in our words

That's the only place we're going to find

OUR HOPE

- From “Urban Warriors” Tanene Allison, San Francisco Youth Commission

INVOLVE YOUTH AS LEADERS AND DECISION-MAKERS

It was noted that a policy agenda providing real youth empowerment means having youth at the table at the highest levels of decision making. Many youth have a strong sense of civic interest and they should be involved at all levels of decision making. If involvement of youth at the policy level is desirable from the standpoint of youth empowerment, it is essential to running an effective youth program. In summary, successful community based programs involve youth as decision-makers. Several attendees added this caveat: Engaging youth means respecting them enough to follow through on promises made. This follow through may be even more important with youth than with adults because adults are more aware of the many ways in which intentions can get bogged down in practicalities.

“Youth Empowerment is often wrongly characterized as something that adults do to or for young people. It is really nothing more than making certain that young people have the support and resources that they need, and then getting out of their way to let what is already inside them surface.”

- Jerry Fest, J.T.Fest Consulting

ACCEPT YOUTH AS POSITIVE NEWSMAKERS

Participants also highlighted the need to change media attitudes. We must learn to be more vigilant about broadcasting the accomplishments of youth. It is no longer acceptable to let the news be dominated by negative problem focused youth stereotypes. Media tend to speak for youth and at youth. A powerful step in the right direction would be giving youth an opportunity to speak for themselves and tell their own stories as newsmakers and reporters.

“Youth empowerment is about including young people as partners so that both youth and adults are empowered.”

-Jerry Fest, J.T.Fest Consulting

RECOMMENDATIONS ON INVOLVING YOUTH IN FEDERAL PROGRAMS

INVOLVE AND EMPOWER YOUTH ACROSS ALL FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Given the perceived need for a federal youth policy that empowers youth; participants believed that the federal government should model youth involvement. Youth involvement should be a mandated part of all federal programs not just those that serve youth. The Department of Labor's youth involvement process and Family Youth Service Bureau youth involvement requirements were cited as positive examples. Moreover, if youth are to be involved in federal programs the manner in which they are involved must provide real opportunity to participate in focus groups and other mechanisms of policy development as

decision-makers. This means developing a partnership environment, in which young people have an opportunity to teach, tell their own story, and mentor those around them.

ENHANCE SERVICE-LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Participants voiced the opinion that federal agencies as well as schools, states and community organizations need to increase opportunities for service learning. It was noted that service learning takes place in a variety of venues including schools, nonprofits and local businesses. Such opportunities can be brokered by a variety of organizations including Americorp, The Corporation for National and Community Service, the Youth Conservation Corp, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Job Corp and the National Park Service. Service learning was felt to be very important because it offers a sense of pride in community while teaching pre-employment skills, team effort and reflection regarding the needs of others. It also provides a strong intergenerational bond in the community. However, many in attendance complained that service-learning opportunities are not as visible as they should be for individual youth. Obtaining written information on programs is often difficult. Making sure that someone calls back when a youth inquires about working with a federal program would be a simple first step. It was suggested that the federal government do more to provide youth with information on how to find service-learning opportunities. Some recommended that the federal government could increase the visibility of service-learning opportunities by forging stronger marketing partnerships with the local communities in which these opportunities occur.

"The most important thing my father ever taught me was that there were more important things than me."

- John Ashcroft, Attorney General

INCREASE FEDERAL YOUTH INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Internship opportunities within the federal system should be also be increased, especially where youth have an opportunity to contribute to policy input. Such internships can support career learning by youth while also providing valuable input too federal agencies.

PROVIDE FEDERAL AGENCIES TRAINING IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

In order to involve youth in federal programs, federal staff at all levels need to be trained in how to implement youth involvement following positive youth development principles. Successful youth involvement will only occur if the federal workplace is a youth friendly workplace where adults know how to work with youth. This process should be one of both advocacy and education. Forum participants suggested that a train-the-trainer model could be developed. This process could be assisted through a clearinghouse or network able to broker training, technical assistance and other consultative resources to federal agencies and youth workers.

INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE GRANT MAKING PROCESS

Requests for proposal need to be written so that young people can read them and engage with the agency in writing an application. Federal staff, community based organizations and youth should be involved in the design of requests for proposal. Young people should receive training in grant writing along with adults and they should be a central part of making award decisions with respect to agency projects and subcontracts. Some funds might be set aside for grants specifically awarded by youth. To help achieve these goals, the grant process itself needs to be accessible to youth. Grant application processes should be simple to read and easy to respond to. The process of applying should also be streamlined. Small agencies have difficulty competing with larger agencies do to the unnecessarily technical nature of grant proposals.

ENCOURAGE A PROFESSIONAL APPROACH TO YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Currently, there are few routes to certification as a youth worker and few paths to a career in youth development. Several discussion groups remarked on the need to reduce youth worker turnover by creating more paths to a professional career for youth workers. It was felt that the issue of professional training and certification should be a high priority in any National youth agenda.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING FEDERAL PROGRAM OPERATIONS

INTEGRATE AND COORDINATE FEDERAL YOUTH POLICY

Federal agencies need to become more familiar with each other's programs, determine where there can be collaboration, eliminate barriers between mutual participation at the grantee level, and coordinate service objectives through the elimination of service duplication and regulatory conflict. Participants expressed a great need to align federal, state and local priorities with respect to youth development. State systems for foster care and juvenile justice are often out of sync with community based prevention programs and both of these are disconnected from shifting federal categorical priorities. For example, youth who do not receive support from community based prevention programs as they age out of foster care easily becomes a homeless youth or, if they commit an offense, a client of the juvenile justice system. Attendees stated that the current policy situation is not a system for dealing in an integrated fashion with the needs of a young person but rather a series of discrete reactions. Nowhere was this felt to be truer than in drug and alcohol services. Participants also suggested that national youth policy do much more to assure that linkages and partnership are in place to overcome this fragmentation. Partnership can work when communities take a team approach to resource mapping so that information on preventative community resources can be shared. Youth recreation providers are probably in the lead with respect to such resource mapping. Again, another important factor is the involvement of young people as leaders and decision-makers because their presence helps to break down barriers by focusing on the whole youth. With these two concepts in mind, National youth policy can be designed to support integration at every level.

“We need to work across the 138 federal programs that concern youth and identify the duplication, linkages, gaps and most important the opportunities where we can partner, share resources and develop comprehensive positive youth development strategies at the national level.”

-Harry Wilson, Associate Commissioner, ACF Family Youth Services Bureau

In addition to the exemplary youth adult partnerships represented by those who participated in the conference; these Puget Sound area partnerships were given special mention during the reporting out process: The Redmond Youth Partnership, The University District Partnership for Youth, Youthcare, The Mockingbird Society, Treehouse and The Center for Ethical Leadership. Other Northwest and Western States partnerships mentioned included: Committed Partners for Youth, Campfire Teens in Action, YMCA Earth corps, CHOICE (Creating Her Own Individual Challenge), River Rampage of Phoenix, 4-H, The Spokane School District Re-entry Program and the WA Responsible Living Skill Programs. Additional partnerships were also given special mention and operate throughout the US: McKinney funded Community Youth Outreach Partnerships, 21st Century Learning Centers, Department of Labor Youth Opportunity Programs, Project Safe-Place, CASSA (Council of Agencies Serving South Asians), National Youth Leadership Network (youth with disabilities) and Family Voices (youth with special health care needs).

PROVIDE FEDERAL SUPPORT THAT IS SUSTAINED AND FLEXIBLE

Another group of recommendations made at the forum focused on federally-funded community-based youth partnerships, emphasizing that they are a long-term process that require time, technical support, the development of linkages and the creation of trusting relationships. Programs do not mature during short appropriation and reporting cycles and they may not develop the quality expected of them in the absence of support. The expectations of funding agencies must be realistic and built on close communication. Federal funding for community based youth partnerships should be as flexible as possible. Policy should help support the organic development of innovation in the community. Often, the reverse happens. Relationships, program designs and linkages in the community develop in response to a narrowly defined category of federal funding. Forum participants emphasized that there is a trade off between innovation and control.

ENCOURAGE FEDERAL REPORTING THAT REFLECTS GROWTH IN YOUTH ASSETS

While seeking flexibility, forum participants also emphasized the importance of accountability, especially with respect to federal resources. We should move beyond reporting only process such as the number of intakes, meals or nights of shelter provided. At the same time, reporting only on final outcomes such as employment found or graduation is unrealistic. Many community programs work long term to build social and vocational assets on which these final outcomes depend. Relevant, useful and sensible reporting requirements would instead focus, in a fine-grained way, on achievement of each of the many assets that can help a young person. This focus should carry over into how grant applications are evaluated and awarded.

PROVIDE BETTER TRAINING ON THE FEDERAL GRANT PROCESS

Those at the forum spoke eloquently of the need for training: A significant increase in training is necessary to build federally funded partnerships with small community based youth organizations. This training should cover everything from youth development principles to financial and administrative best practices as they relate to developing a successful federal grant. Bidder's conferences that cover youth related grant announcements from multiple federal agencies should be considered as they would greatly enhance the ability of community agencies to identify appropriate sources of funding and ways in which funding can be coordinated. It was expressed that training needs to occur at the regional level. Regional bidder's conferences and training can help provide information that will allow community agencies to dovetail federal programs. Regional training and bidder's conferences are also more accessible by both adults and youth that might like to participate. Finally, such events foster networking between agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM SPECIFIC YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

CREATE A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF THE VALUE OF YOUTH INPUT

Participants offered many tips on youth input: It is helpful to understand which issues most concern youth. Youth input cannot be coerced. It must result from a dialogue centered in respect and the opportunity to speak up. The process of developing youth input should occur incrementally so that adjustments can be made to assure that the process adds value for all those involved. Youth input is not window dressing; it is central to improving the quality of any endeavor that serves or impacts youth. Adults in a youth program who are not constantly in dialogue with youth about how well the program is doing are not receiving the input they need for a successful program. If youth care about a program, they will make mature adult-like decisions and they will participate in a process of continuous program improvement

CLEARLY DEFINE RESULTS EXPECTED OF YOUTH

Forum participants said that youth involvement should be focused and task specific so that there is some immediate feedback and sense of success. This is because federal, state and community programs tend to change very slowly. At a minimum there should be a true discussion of youth viewpoints. Youth will lose interest if they do not see that they are really making a difference. Youth can be helped to understand that community goals sometimes require complex systems change and that such change is slow, nevertheless youth will still want some immediate action and reaction so that they feel successful in their work efforts. This might involve some short, immediate change even if incremental. While the dream might be big, effort should be made to identify discrete tasks and give every youth ownership in accomplishing some of these tasks.

IDENTIFY THE MANNER IN WHICH YOUTH INPUT WILL BE SOUGHT

Participants from the forum believe there are many effective methods, which can be used to obtain youth input. These methods can include: youth advisory boards, youth integration to a larger board, task focused groups, delegation of limited budget authority,

plans for services to youth, surveys, suggestion boxes, specific issue focused forums and the hiring of youth as interns, consultants or direct service workers.

PROVIDE THOSE INVOLVED WITH SUPPORT AND TRAINING

Regardless of the method used for youth input and involvement, forum participants believe that all adults involved in youth support and training should themselves receive training on the value of accessing youth opinion. Role-playing can be one of the most helpful techniques in this regard. Again, participants reiterated that it was important to come to a clear consensus on what authority and responsibility will be given to youth.

CREATE MENTORING OPPORTUNITIES

When involving youth, it is important to focus on mentoring opportunities including youth peers as mentors and youth peer support groups. Alumni who have been through the youth input process can provide mentoring and peer-support to new youth and adults as they join. For example, when a youth is placed on a board, a mentor who has served on the board should be assigned. Mentoring based on open communication should be considered a high priority because it honors the strength of youth while providing meaningful and engaging work that matches the interests of a particular youth.

“Mentoring is about modeling the importance of good citizenship, honesty, respect, appreciation of diversity, and a sense of responsibility.”

- Ann Veneman, Secretary, US Department of Agriculture

GIVE YOUTH FAIR COMPENSATION

Discussion groups were also concerned about fairness. When youth are involved they should be compensated and provided adequate training to give their involvement credibility. This compensation may often be in the form of pay; however it can also take other forms such as helping youth with placements after training. This would be especially important to youth who have a history that makes finding employment difficult.

ENCOURAGE DYNAMIC HUMAN RESOURCE POLICIES

Some attendees mentioned the need to address personnel policies. When working with youth, human resource policies need to be carefully considered. There is high turnover among youth as they transition to other goals and change relationships with their peers. Low pay contributes to this turnover among both youth and youth workers. It is also important to give attention to liability concerns and child labor laws

CREATE YOUTH FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS

Discussions emphasized that youth involvement begins with a working environment that is comfortable and casual not just focused on business. Just like adults, youth who are being expected to work as part of a team need an opportunity to break the ice, ask questions, have a little fun and get to know one another within a group of reasonable size. Even creative

seating and appropriate attention to scheduling when meetings will occur can make major differences. Often it is best to provide mentoring through a team process. Unnecessary and complicated paperwork is a high bar for youth involvement. Youth programs seeking funding for youth services should be able to directly involve youth even in the funding proposal process. This would require providing youth with adequate training but it would also require developing a simple, jargon free, plain English, application process.

SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTS WHERE SETBACKS ARE VIEWED AS OPPORTUNITES

Participants said that real youth involvement requires the creation of supportive environments where setbacks are viewed as opportunities to learn and grow stronger. Occasional setbacks can be a valuable learning experience while not being empowered to make choices results in resignation rather than self-development. Creating these environments means that adults need to take risks by giving up power and allowing their young partner to take the lead. If done in a supportive way, such risk taking never exposes youth to inadequate support or dangerous consequences.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING AGENCY OUTREACH TO YOUTH

USE PEER OUTREACH TO CONNECT WITH YOUTH IN SCHOOLS AND ON THE STREETS

Highlighting recommendations on outreach, it was suggested that agencies wishing to increase youth involvement in their service programs should consider employing peer leaders to reach out to and interview other youth both in school settings and on the streets. This is especially effective in high school where youth can tell their story to other youth. Youth can even support other youth in planning for their future and choosing post secondary school or career goals. Outreach is effective only if it occurs where the young people are. That means bringing outreach to the community.

EMPHASIZE TECHNOLOGY

Many groups mentioned that young people are accustomed to using technology and that it should be more readily used to reach them. Web sites, email, list serves and electronic newsletters should be extensively used. Good examples of such usage include the *Department of Labor Youth newsletter* and *Serve Net*, the Youth Serve America network from the Corporation for National and Community Service. Low technology methods such as flyers and telephone hotlines, special events and press conferences can also be powerful ways of reaching youth.

USE ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL AVENUES TO CONNECT WITH YOUTH

Attendees thought that agencies should collaborate with community event promoters. Art speaks to all youth as it does to many adults, across ethnicity. Artistic activity involving youth and the use of literary, visual and performing art as a medium to reach youth has historically been a powerful tool for engaging youth and adults as partners.

ASSURE THAT OUTREACH IS CULTURALLY COMPETENT

Attendees stressed that young people communicate and act differently than adults while at the same time remembering that outreach must focus on each unique individual. Outreach must work with a variety of family structures and it must be culturally competent.

PLAN TO MAKE YOUTH PROGRAMS ACCESSIBLE

Lack of transportation and poor program location are two of the most significant barriers keeping young people from participating. Giving youth a convenient and safe way to get to the program should be a consideration of first importance in urban and rural areas. Additional consideration should be given to assuring that programs are fully accessible by youth with disabilities.

MAKE THE FUNDING PROCESS A POINT OF OUTREACH

Forum participants thought that the invisibility of federal programs in which youth might become engaged is partly due to a process of funding youth partnerships that is lackluster in its approach to outreach and marketing. Even elected officials have a difficult time keeping track of all the narrowly focused youth programs. The plethora of specialized programs are often pitched at a technical level which practically precludes youth involvement and therefore customer input. Each funding stream follows a unique time frame and process focused on one need such as housing, employment or education. While it may not be possible to integrate or consolidate these funding streams federal agencies should strive to hold well publicized joint bidder's conferences that include youth so that the whole needs of youth as individuals might be better addressed. Better use of media should be used to advertise joint bidder's conferences and every effort should be made to provide workshops that will support the involvement of youth in the grants making process.